



**GRAFTON**  
Massachusetts

Nicole Larson <larsonn@grafton-ma.gov>

## Public Comment Form:

Town of Grafton MA <vtstdmailer@vt-s.net>

Wed, Jul 13, 2016 at 10:26 PM

To: planningdept@grafton-ma.gov

Submitted on Wednesday, July 13, 2016 - 10:26pm

Submitted by anonymous user: 72.70.55.90

Submitted values are:

Choose a Project: Elmrock Estates (Fieldstone Farms) - Wheeler Road - North  
Grafton - 36 Single Family Houses - Potential 40B Project

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Street Address: 168 Brigham Hill Rd.

City: North Grafton

State: Massachusetts

Public Comment Disclaimer: I have read and understand the Public Comment  
Disclaimer.

Comments:

As a lifelong resident of Grafton, member of the Board of Directors of the Grafton Land Trust, and Coordinator for the Kestrel Project, I oppose this development. I have a Master's in Conservation Biology and Applied Ecology, recently graduated from UMASS Forestry Extension's Massachusetts Keystone Project training, and currently work as a Plant Protection Technician with the USDA on the Asian Longhorned Beetle Eradication Project, which has resulted in the loss of +35,000 trees in Worcester. Green corridors such as that provided by the current parcel under consideration and surrounding GLT lands that stretch from Lake Ripple to Millbury help assuage these losses and provides habitat to migratory and resident floral and faunal species, many of which are declining, threatened or endangered. My thesis focused on a declining migratory forest songbird due to loss of overwintering and migratory stopover habitat, and I currently work with the Grafton Land Trust establishing nesting habitat for the declining American Kestrel, which relies on open space for breeding. Our project includes an ongoing and extensive volunteer effort into establishing, monitoring and maintaining nest boxes which, in only its second year, have fledged 9 American Kestrels banded by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. The success of the project demonstrates the value of the open space this town has to offer. We have 2 boxes in the vicinity of the proposed development, and the American Kestrel prefers open space territories at least a mile apart to satisfy breeding requirements. The results from the first year of the Kestrel Project were presented to a sold-out crowd of 100 attendees at the Grafton Land Trust's 2015 Annual dinner, which demonstrates how deeply residents care about wildlife habitat preservation in Grafton.

The open space on which this development is proposed provides invaluable ecosystem function and worth to wildlife and recreation. However, to put a rough dollar value per hectare on the services provided by these and abutting parcels, which contain a mix of temperate forest, inland wetlands, freshwater rivers and lakes, woodlands, and grassland habitat, using the methods of R. de Groot et al. 2012, the worth is between \$1,588-\$25,682 per ha (De Groot, Rudolf, et al. "Global estimates of the value of ecosystems and their services in monetary units." Ecosystem services 1.1 (2012): 50-61). Values provided by these biome types include Provisioning services (Food, Water Raw materials, Genetic resources, Medicinal resources, Ornamental resources); Regulating services (Air quality regulation, Climate regulation, Disturbance moderation, Regulation of water flows, Waste treatment, Erosion prevention, Nutrient cycling, Pollination, Biological control); and Habitat services

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(Nursery service, Genetic diversity, Cultural services, Esthetic information, Recreation, Inspiration, Spiritual experience, Cognitive development). For 7.3 ha, this project could potentially result in the destruction of \$11,592-\$187,479 worth of ecosystem value and cultural services, for a project that only contributes .4% of the 10% affordable housing quota the town needs to meet (quoted from Planning Board meeting 7/11/16).

People choose to live and stay in Grafton vs. cheaper places like Worcester because of its greenscape and small-town character, including community involvement at places like the Brigham Hill Community Barn, as well as recreational opportunities such as hunting, hiking and wildlife watching. Building dense developments on inappropriate sites undermines the town's 2006 Affordable Housing plan, which is to, "limit residential development to those projects that are sensitive to the environment and Town infrastructure and another is to encourage housing development patterns that preserve open space and natural features", as well as the Vision Statement from the 2001 Grafton Comprehensive Master Plan, in which "open space" appears 126 times, in context such as, "open space preservation is considered integral to our town's character". The mission of the Planning Board states that it has a "a long term commitment to economic vitality, environmental integrity, and development design through the highest quality planning, implementation and development review". The town cannot support any development which contradicts these plans and missions.

A letter from the Town Planner to the Board of Selectman notes that open space under the current plan is in the back yard of homes; to suggest that yards containing a monoculture of grass on top of disturbed soils provide the same ecosystem function and services of open space is ludicrous, and there are no provisions which would limit further development by owners on these parcels. Multiple studies have been conducted demonstrating the harmful effects of traditional manicured lawn maintenance, including increased pesticide, fertilizer, water, and energy use, leading to increased groundwater and air pollution, and landscape fragmentation resulting in loss of biodiversity and without returning any value (Han, Xili, et al. "Public Attitudes about Urban Lawns: Social Opportunities Provided by Urban Lawns in Lund, Sweden." International Academic Workshop on Social Science (IAW-SC-13). Atlantis Press, 2013).

Given the value of these existing parcels in and of themselves, as well as part of a connective network of open space stretching across half of the town, I would urge denial of any plan which: does not plan for water quality treatments or stormwater management; does not reduce fragmentation by creating greenways or connectivity to trails; and interferes with residents' rights to hunt on abutting land trust property due to the 500' residential setback as required by state law.

Thank you,  
Christine Thurber

The results of this submission may be viewed at:  
<http://www.grafton-ma.gov/node/86623/submission/993>